

*The Philosophic Grammar of American Languages, as set forth by Wilhelm von Humboldt, with the translation of an unpublished memoir by him on the American Verb. By Daniel G. Brinton, M.D.*

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### § 1. INTRODUCTORY.

The foundations of the Philosophy of Language were laid by Wilhelm von Humboldt (b. June 22, 1767, d. April 8, 1835). The principles he advocated have frequently been misunderstood, and some of them have been modified, or even controverted, by more extended research; but a careful survey of the tendencies of modern thought in this field will show that the philosophic scheme of the nature and growth of languages, which he set forth, is gradually reasserting its sway, after having been neglected and denied through the preponderance of the so-called naturalistic school during the last quarter of a century.

The time seems ripe, therefore, to bring the general principles of his philosophy to the knowledge of American scholars, especially as applied by himself to the analysis of American languages.

Any one at all acquainted with Humboldt's writings, and the literature to which they have given rise, will recognize that this is a serious task. I have felt it such, and have prepared myself for it not only by a careful perusal of his own published writings, but also by a comparison of the conflicting interpretations put upon them by Dr. Max Schasler,\* Prof. H. Steinthal,† Prof. C. J. Adler,‡ and others, as well as by obtaining a copy of an entirely unpublished memoir by Humboldt on the "American

\* *Die Elemente der Philosophischen Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's. In systematischer Entwicklung dargestellt und kritisch erläutert*, von Dr. Max Schasler, Berlin, 1847.

† *Die Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's und die Hegel'sche Philosophie*, von H. Steinthal, Dr., Berlin, 1848. The same eminent linguist treats especially of Humboldt's teachings in *Grammatik, Logik und Psychologie, ihre Principien und ihr Verhältniss zu einander*, pp. 123-135 (Berlin, 1855); in his well-known volume *Characteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, pp. 20-70 (Berlin, 860); in his recent oration *Ueber Wilhelm von Humboldt* (Berlin, 1883); and elsewhere.

‡ *Wilhelm von Humboldt's Linguistical Studies*. By C. J. Adler, A. M. (New York, 1866). This is the only attempt, so far as I know, to present Humboldt's philosophy of language to English readers. It is meritorious, but certainly in some passages Prof. Adler failed to catch Humboldt's meaning.

Verb," a translation of which accompanies this paper. But my chief reliance in solving the obscurities of Humboldt's presentation of his doctrines has been a close comparison of allied passages in his various essays, memoirs and letters. Of these I need scarcely say that I have attached the greatest weight to his latest and monumental work sometimes referred to as his "Introduction to the Kawi Language," but whose proper title is "On Differences in Linguistic Structure, and their Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Race."\*

I would not have it understood that I am presenting a complete analysis of Humboldt's linguistic philosophy. This is far beyond the scope of the present paper. It aims to set forth merely enough of his general theories to explain his applications of them to the languages of the American race.

What I have to present can best be characterized as a series of notes on Humboldt's writings, indicating their bearing on the problems of American philology, introducing his theories to students of this branch, and serving as a preface to the hitherto unpublished essay by him on the American Verb, to which I have referred.

## § 2. HUMBOLDT'S STUDIES IN AMERICAN LANGUAGES.

The American languages occupied Humboldt's attention earnestly and for many years. He was first led to their study by his brother Alexander, who presented him with the large linguistic collection he had amassed during his travels in South and North America.

While Prussian Minister in Rome (1802-08), he ransacked the library of the *Collegio Romano* for rare or unpublished works on American tongues; he obtained from the ex-Jesuit Forneri all the information the latter could give about the Yurari, a tongue spoken on the Meta river, New Granada;† and he secured accurate copies of all the manuscript material on these

\* *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*. Prof. Adler translates this: "The Structural Differences of Human Speech and their Influence on the Intellectual Development of the Human Race." The word *geistige*, however, includes emotional as well as intellectual things.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 271, note. I may say, once for all, that my references, unless otherwise stated, are to the edition of Humboldt's *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by his brother, Berlin, 1841-1852.

idioms left by the diligent collector and linguist, the Abbé Hervas.

A few years later, in 1812, we find him writing to his friend Baron Alexander von Rennenkampff, then in St. Petersburg: "I have selected the American languages as the special subject of my investigations. They have the closest relationship of any with the tongues of north-eastern Asia; and I beg you therefore to obtain for me all the dictionaries and grammars of the latter which you can."\*

It is probable from this extract that Humboldt was then studying these languages from that limited, ethnographic point of view, from which he wrote his essay on the Basque tongue, the announcement of which appeared, indeed, in that year, 1812, although the work itself was not issued until 1821.

Ten years more of study and reflection taught him a far loftier flight. He came to look upon each language as an organism, all its parts bearing harmonious relations to each other, and standing in a definite connection with the intellectual and emotional development of the nation speaking it. Each language again bears the relation to language in general that the species does to the genus, or the genus to the order, and by a comprehensive process of analysis he hoped to arrive at those fundamental laws of articulate speech which form the Philosophy of Language, and which, as they are also the laws of human thought, at a certain point coincide, he believed, with those of the Philosophy of History.

In the completion of this vast scheme, he continued to attach the utmost importance to the American languages. His illustrations were constantly drawn from them, and they were ever the subject of his earnest studies. He prized them as in certain respects the most valuable of all to the philosophic student of human speech.

Thus, in 1826, he announced before the Berlin Academy that he was preparing an exhaustive work on the "Organism of Language," for which he had selected the American languages exclusively, as best suited for this purpose. "The languages of a great continent," he writes, "peopled by numerous nationali-

\* *Aus Wilhelm von Humboldt's letzten Lebensjahren. Eine Mittheilung bisher unbekannter Briefe.* Von Theodor Distel, p. 19 (Leipzig, 1883).

ties, probably never subject to foreign influence, offer for this branch of linguistic study specially favorable material. There are in America as many as thirty little known languages for which we have means of study, each of which is like a new natural species, besides many others whose data are less ample.”\*

In his memoir, read two years later, “On the Origin of Grammatical Forms, and their Influence on the Development of Ideas,” he chose most of his examples from the idioms of the New World;† and the year following, he read the monograph on the Verb in American languages, which is printed for the first time with the present essay.

In a later paper, he announced his special study of this group as still in preparation. It was, however, never completed. His earnest desire to reach the fundamental laws of language led him first into a long series of investigations into the systems of recorded speech, phonetic hieroglyphics and alphabetic writing, on which he read memoirs of great acuteness.

In one of these he again mentions his studies of the American tongues, and takes occasion to vindicate them from the current charge of being of a low grade in the linguistic scale. “It is certainly unjust,” he writes, “to call the American languages rude or savage, although their structure is widely different from those perfectly formed.”‡

In 1828, there is a published letter from him making an appointment with the Abbé Thavenet, missionary to the Canadian Algonkins, then in Paris, “to enjoy the pleasure of conversing with him on his interesting studies of the Algonkin language.”|| And a private letter tells us that in 1831 he applied himself with new zeal to mastering the intricacies of Mexican grammar.§

About 1827, he found it indispensable to subject to a critical scrutiny the languages of the great island world of the Pacific

\* From his memoir *Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, Bd. iii, s. 249.

† He draws examples from the Carib, Lule, Tupi, Mbaya, Huasteca, Nahuatl, Tamanaca, Abipone, and Mixteca; *Ueber das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen, und ihren Einfluss auf die Ideenentwicklung*, Bd. iii, ss. 269-306.

‡ *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihren Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau* Bd. vi, s. 526.

|| This letter is printed in the memoir of Prof. E. Teza, *Intorno agli Studi de Thavenet sulla Lingua Algonchina*, in the *Annali delle Università toscane*, Tomo xviii (Pisa, 1880).

§ Compare Prof. Adler's Essay, above mentioned, p. 11.

and Indian oceans. This resulted at last in his selecting the Kawi language, a learned idiom of the island of Java, Malayan in origin but with marked traces of Hindu influence, as the point of departure for his generalizations. His conclusions were set forth in the introductory essay above referred to.

The avowed purpose of this essay was to demonstrate the thesis that the *diversity of structure in languages is the necessary condition of the evolution of the human mind*.\*

In the establishment of this thesis he begins with a profound analysis of the nature of speech in general, and then proceeds to define the reciprocal influences which thought exerts upon it, it upon thought.

Portions of this work are extremely obscure even to those who are most familiar with his theories and style. This arises partly from the difficulty of the subject; partly because his anxiety to avoid dogmatic statements led him into vagueness of expression; and partly because in some cases he was uncertain of his ground. In spite of these blemishes, this essay remains the most suggestive work ever written on the philosophy of language.

### § 3. THE FINAL PURPOSE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE.

Humboldt has been accused of being a metaphysician, and a scientific idealist.

It is true that he believed in an ideal perfection of language, to wit: that form of expression which would correspond throughout to the highest and clearest thinking. But it is evident from this simple statement that he did not expect to find it in any known or possible tongue. He distinctly says, that this ideal is too hypothetical to be used otherwise than as a stimulus to investigation; but as such it is indispensable to the linguist in the pursuit of his loftiest task—the estimate of the efforts of man to realize perfection of expression.†

\* This is found expressed nowhere else so clearly as at the beginning of § 13, where the author writes: "Der Zweck dieser Einleitung, die Sprachen, in der Verschiedenartigkeit ihres Baues, als die nothwendige Grundlage der Fortbildung des menschlichen Geistes darzustellen, und den wechselseitigen Einfluss des Einen auf das Andre zu erörtern, hat mich genöthigt, in die Natur der Sprache überhaupt einzugehen." Bd. vi, s. 106.

† "Der Idee der Sprachvollendung Dasein in der Wirklichkeit zu gewinnen." Ueber die Verschiedenheit, ss. 10 and 11. The objection which may be urged that a true philosophy of language must deal in universals and not confine itself to mere differentiations (particulars) is neatly met by Dr. Schasler, *Die Elemente der Philosophischen Sprachwissenschaft*, etc., p. 21, note.

There is nothing teleological in his philosophy; he even declines to admit that either the historian or the linguist has a right to set up a theory of progress or evolution; the duty of both is confined to deriving the completed meaning from the facts before them.\* He merely insists that as the object of language is the expression of thought, certain forms of language are better adapted to this than others. What these are, why they are so, and how they react on the minds of the nations speaking them, are the questions he undertakes to answer, and which constitute the subject-matter with which the philosophy of language has to do.

Humboldt taught that in its highest sense this philosophy of language is one with the philosophy of history. The science of language misses its purpose unless it seeks its chief end in explaining the intellectual growth of the race.†

Each separate tongue is "a thought-world in tones" established between the minds of those who speak it and the objective world without.‡ Each mirrors in itself the spirit of the nation to which it belongs. But it has also an earlier and independent origin; it is the product of the conceptions of antecedent generations, and thus exerts a formative and directive influence on the national mind, an influence, not slight, but more potent than that which the national mind exerts upon it.¶

So also every word has a double character, the one derived from its origin, the other from its history: The former is single, the latter is manifold.§

Were the gigantic task possible to gather from every language the full record of every word and the complete explanation of

\* In his remarkable essay "On the Mission of the Historian," which Prof. Adler justly describes as "scarcely anything more than a preliminary to his linguistic researches," Humboldt writes: "Die Philosophie schreibt den Begebenheiten ein Ziel vor; dies Suchen nach Endursachen, man mag sie auch aus dem Wesen des Menschen und der Natur selbst ableiten wollen, stört und verfälscht alle freie Ansicht des eigenthümlichen Wirkens der Kräfte." *Ueber die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers*, Bd. i, s. 13.

† "Das Studium der verschiedenen Sprachen des Erdbodens verfehlt seine Bestimmung, wenn es nicht immer den Gang der geistigen Bildung im Auge behält, und darin seinen eigentlichen Zweck sucht." *Ueber den Zusammenhang der Schrift mit der Sprache*, Bd. vi, s. 428.

‡ "Eine Gedankenwelt an Töne geheftet." *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihre Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau*, Bd. vi, s. 530.

¶ This cardinal point in Humboldt's philosophy is very clearly set forth in his essay, "*Ueber die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers*," Bd. i, s. 23, and elsewhere.

§ See *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 530.

each grammatical peculiarity, we should have an infallible, the only infallible and exhaustive, picture of human progress.

#### § 4. HISTORICAL, COMPARATIVE AND PHILOSOPHIC GRAMMAR.

The Science of Grammar has three branches, which differ more in the methods they pursue than in the ends at which they aim. These are Historic, Comparative and Philosophic Grammar. Historic Grammar occupies itself with tracing the forms of a language back in time to their earlier expression, and exhibits their development through the archaic specimens of the tongue. Comparative Grammar extends this investigation by including in the survey the similar development of a number of dialects of the same stock or character, and explains the laws of speech, which account for the similarities and diversities observed.

Both of these, it will be observed, begin with the language and its forms, and are confined to these. Philosophic Grammar, on the other hand, proceeds from the universal constructive principles of language, from the abstract formulæ of grammatical relations, and investigates their application in various languages. It looks upon articulate speech as the more or less faithful expression of certain logical procedures, and analyzes tongues in order to exhibit the success, be it greater or less, which attends this effort. The grammatical principles with which it deals are universals, they exist in all minds, although it often happens that they are not portrayed with corresponding clearness in language.\*

Philosophic Grammar, therefore, includes in its horizon all languages spoken by men; it essays to analyze their inmost nature with reference to the laws of thought; it weighs the relations they bear to the character and destiny of those who speak them; and it ascends to the psychological needs and impulses which first gave them existence.

It was grammar in this highest sense, it was the study of lan-

\* "Les notions grammaticales resident bien plutôt dans l'esprit de celui qui parle que dans le matériel du langage." Humboldt, *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat Werke*, Bd. vii, s. 396. On the realms of the three varieties of grammar, see also Dr. M. Schasler, *Die Elemente der Philosophischen Sprachwissenschaft*, etc., s. 35, 36, and Friedrich Müller, *Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft*, Band i, ss. 8-10 (Wien, 1876). Schasler observes that a main object in philosophic grammar is an investigation of "die genetisch-qualitativen Unterschiede der Redetheile," that is, of the fundamental psychological differences of the parts of speech, as, what is the ultimate distinction between noun and adjective, etc.?

guages for such lofty purposes as these, with which Humboldt occupied himself with untiring zeal for the last fifteen years of his life, when he had laid aside the cares of the elevated and responsible political positions which he had long filled with distinguished credit.

### § 5. DEFINITION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE.

Humboldt remarks that the first hundred pages or so of his celebrated "Introduction" are little more than an expansion of his definition of language. He gives this definition in its most condensed form as follows: "Language is the ever-recurring effort of the mind to make the articulate sound capable of expressing thought."\*

According to this definition, language is not a dead thing, a completed product, but it is an ever-living, active function, an energy of the soul, which will perish only when intelligence itself, in its highest sense, is extinguished. As he expresses it, language is not an *εργον*, but an *ενεργεια*. It is the proof and the product of a mind *consciously* working to a definite end.

Hence, in Humboldt's theory the psychological element of *self-consciousness* lies at the root of all linguistic expression. No mere physical difference between the lower animals and man explains the latter's possession of articulate speech. His self-consciousness alone is that trait which has rendered such a possession possible.†

The idea of Self necessarily implies the idea of Other. A thought is never separate, never isolated, but ever in relation to another thought, suggested by one, leading on to another. Hence, Humboldt says: "The mind can only be conceived as in action, and *as action*."

As Prof. Adler, in his comments on Humboldt's philosophy,

\* Steinthal does not like Humboldt's expression "to make capable" (*fähig zu machen*). He objects that the "capacity" to express thought is already in the articulate sounds. But what Humboldt wishes to convey is precisely that this capacity is only derived from the ceaseless, energizing effort of the intellect. Steinthal, *Die Sprachwissenschaft Wilhelm von Humboldt's*, s. 91, note. The words in the original are: "Die sich ewig wiederholende Arbeit des Geistes, den articulirten Laut zum Ausdruck des Gedanken *fähig zu machen*."

† "Nur die Stärke des Selbstbewusstseins nöthigt der körperlichen Natur die scharfe Theilung und feste Begrenzung der Laute ab, die wir Artikulation nennen." *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die Verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, Bd. iii, s. 244.



admirably observes: "Man does not possess any such thing as an absolutely isolated individuality; the 'I' and the 'thou' are the essential complements of each other, and would, in their last analysis, be found identical."\*

On these two fundamental conceptions, those of Identity and Relation, or, as they may be expressed more correctly, those of Being and Action, Humboldt builds his doctrines concerning the primitive radicals of language and the fundamental categories of grammar.

### § 6. PRIMITIVE ROOTS AND GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES.

The roots of a language are classified by Humboldt as either *objective* or *subjective*, although he considers this far from an exhaustive scheme.†

The objective roots are usually descriptive, and indicate an origin from a process of mental analysis. They bear the impress of those two attributes which characterize every thought, Being and Action. Every complete objective word must express these two notions. Upon them are founded the fundamental grammatical categories of the Noun and the Verb; or to speak more accurately, they lead to the distinction of nominal and verbal themes.

The characteristic of the Noun is that it expresses Being; of the Verb that it expresses Action. This distinction is far from absolute in the word itself; in many languages, especially in Chinese and some American languages, there is in the word no discrimination between its verbal and nominal forms; but the verbal or nominal *value* of the word is clearly fixed by other means.‡

Another class of objective root-words are the adjective words, or Determinatives. They are a later accession to the list, and by their addition bring the three chief grammatical categories, the Noun, the Verb and the Adjective, into correlation with the three logical categories of Substance, Action and Quality.

\* Ubi supra, p. 17. Compare Humboldt's words, "Im Ich aber ist von selbst auch das Du gegeben." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 115.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 116; and compare Dr. Schasler's discussion of this subject (which is one of the best parts of his book), *Die Elemente der Phil. Sprachwissenschaft*, etc., ss. 202-14.

‡ Expressed in detail by Humboldt in his *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat sur la nature des formes grammaticales*, etc., Bd. vii, ss. 300-303.

By the subjective roots, Humboldt meant the personal pronouns. To these he attributed great importance in the development of language, and especially of American languages. They carry with them the mark of sharp individuality, and express in its highest reality the notion of Being.

It is not easy to understand Humboldt's theory of the evolution of the personal pronouns. In his various essays he seems to offer conflicting statements. In one of his later papers, he argues that the origin of such subjective nominals is often, perhaps generally, locative. By comparing the personal pronouns with the adverbs of place in a series of languages, he showed that their demonstrative antedated their personal meaning.\* With regard to their relative development, he says, in his celebrated "Introduction":

"The first person expresses the individuality of the speaker, who is in immediate contact with external nature, and must distinguish himself from it in his speech. But in the 'I' the 'Thou' is assumed; and from the antithesis thus formed is developed the third person."†

But in his "Notice of the Japanese Grammar of Father Oyan-guren," published in 1826, he points out that infants begin by speaking of themselves in the third person, showing that this comes first in the order of knowledge. It is followed by the second person, which separates one object from others; but as it does so by putting it in conscious antithesis to the speaker, it finally develops the "I."‡

The latter is unquestionably the correct statement so far as the history of language is concerned and the progress of knowledge. I can know myself only through knowing others.

The explanation which reconciles these theories is that the one refers to the order of thought, or logical precedence, the other to the order of expression. Professor Ferrier, in his "Institutes of Metaphysics," has established with much acuteness the thesis that, "What is first in the order of nature is last in the order of knowledge," and this is an instance of that philosophical principle.

\* *Ueber die Verwandtschaft der Ortsadverbia mit dem Pronomen in einigen Sprachen*, in the *Abhandlungen der hist.-phil. Classe der Berliner Akad. der Wiss.* 1829

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Bd. vi, s. 115.

‡ *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. vii, ss. 392-6.

## § 7. FORMAL AND MATERIAL ELEMENTS OF LANGUAGE.

A fundamental distinction in philosophic grammar is that which divides the *formal* from the *material* element of speech. This division arises from the original double nature of each radical, as expressing both Being and Action.

On the one hand, Action involves Relation; it assumes an object and a subject, an agent, a direction of effort, a result of effort; usually also limitations of effort, time and space, and qualifications as to the manner of the effort. In other words, Action is capable of increase or decrease both in extension and intension.

On the other hand, Being is a conception of fixed conditions, and is capable of few or no modifications.

The *formal* elements of a language are those which express Action, or the relation of the ideas; they make up the affixes of conjugations and declensions, the inflections of words; they indicate the parts of speech, the so-called "grammatical categories," found in developed tongues. The *material* elements are the roots or stems expressing the naked ideas, the conceptions of existence apart from relation.

Using the terms in this sense, Humboldt presents the following terse formula, as his definition of Inflection: "*Inflection is the expression of the category in contrast to the definition of the idea.*"\* Nothing could be more definitive and lucid than this concise phrase.

The inflectional or formal elements of language are usually derived from words expressing accessory ideas. Generally, they are worn down to single letters or a single syllable, and they usually may be traced back to auxiliary verbs and pronouns.

Often various accessories are found which are not required by the main proposition. This is a common fault in the narratives of ignorant men and in languages and dialects of a lower grade. It is seen in the multiplication of auxiliaries and qualifying particles observed in many American languages, where a vast

\* His explanation of inflection is most fully given in his Introductory Essay, *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., § 14, *Gesammelte Werke*, s. 121. sqq. A sharp, but friendly criticism of this central point of his linguistic philosophy may be found in Steinthal, *Charakteristik der Hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues*, ss. 58-61. Humboldt certainly appears not only obscure in parts but contradictory.

number of needless accessories are brought into every sentence.

The nature of the relations expressed by inflections may be manifold, and it is one of the tasks of philosophic grammar to analyze and classify them with reference to the direction of mental action they imply.

It is evident that where these relations are varied and numerous, the language gains greatly in picturesqueness and force, and thus reacts with a more stimulating effect on the mind.

### § 8. THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGES.

Humboldt believed that in this respect languages could be divided into three classes, each representing a stage in progressive development.

In the first and lowest stage all the elements are material and significant, and there are no true formal parts of speech.

Next above this is where the elements of relation lose their independent significance *where so used*, but retain it elsewhere. The words are not yet fixed in grammatical categories. There is no distinction between verbs and nouns except in use. The plural conveys the idea of many, but the singular not strictly that of unity.

Highest of all is that condition of language where every word is subject to grammatical law and shows by its form what category it comes under; and where the relational or formal elements convey no hint of anything but this relation. Here, only, does language attain to that specialization of parts where each element subserves its own purpose and no other, and here only does it correspond with clear and connected thinking.

These expressions, however, must not be understood in a genetic sense, as if historically one linguistic class had preceded the other, and led up to it. Humboldt entertained no such view. He distinctly repudiated it. He did not believe in the evolution of languages. The differences of these classes are far more radical than that of sounds and signs; they reach down to the fundamental notions of things. His teaching was that a language without a passive voice, or without a grammatical gender can never acquire one, and consequently it can never perfectly express the conceptions corresponding to these features.\*

\* See these teachings clearly set forth in his Essay, *Ueber das vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung auf die verschiedenen Epochen der Sprachentwicklung*, Werke, Bd. iii, especially, s. 255 and s. 262.

In defining and appraising these inherent and inalienable qualities of languages lies the highest end and aim of linguistic science. This is its true philosophic character, its mission which lifts it above the mere collecting of words and formulating of rules.

If the higher languages did not develop from the lower, how did they arise? Humboldt answered this question fairly, so far as he was concerned. He said, he did not know. Individuals vary exceedingly in their talent for language, and so do nations. He was willing to call it an innate creative genius which endowed our Aryan forefathers with a richly inflected speech; but it was so contrary to the results of his prolonged and profound study of languages to believe, for instance, that a tongue like the Sanscrit could ever be developed from one like the Chinese, that he frankly said that he would rather accept at once the doctrine of those who attribute the different idioms of men to an immediate revelation from God.\*

He fully recognized, however, a progress, an organic growth, in human speech, and he expressly names this as a special branch of linguistic investigation.† He lays down that this growth may be from two sources, one the cultivation of a tongue within the nation by enriching its vocabulary, separating and classifying its elements, fixing its expressions, and thus adapting it to wider uses; the second, by forcible amalgamation with another tongue.

The latter exerts always a more profound and often a more beneficial influence. The organism of both tongues may be destroyed, but the dissolvent force is also an organic and vital one, and from the ruins of both constructs a speech of grander plans and with wider views. "The seemingly aimless and confused interminglings of primitive tribes sowed the seed for the flowers of speech and song which flourished in centuries long posterior."

The immediate causes of the improvement of a language through forcible admixture with another, are: that it is obliged to drop all unnecessary accessory elements in a proposition; that the relations of ideas must be expressed by conventional and not significant syllables; and that the limitations of thought imposed

\* The eloquent and extraordinary passage in which these opinions are expressed is in his *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat, Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. vii, ss. 336-7.

† *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. iii, ss. 218, 257.

by the genius of the language are violently broken down, and the mind is thus given wider play for its faculties.

Such influences, however, do not act in accordance with fixed laws of growth. There are no such laws, which are of universal application. The development of the Mongolian or Aryan tongues is not at all that of the American. The goal is one and the same, but the paths to it are infinite. For this reason each group or class of languages must be studied by itself, and its own peculiar developmental laws be ascertained by searching its history.\*

With reference to the growth of American languages, it was Humboldt's view that they manifest the utmost refractoriness both to external influence and to internal modifications. They reveal a marvellous tenacity of traditional words and forms, not only in dialects, but even in particular classes of the community, men having different expressions from women, the old from the young, the higher from the lower classes. These are maintained with scrupulous exactitude through generations, and except by the introduction of words, three centuries of daily commingling with the white race, have not at all altered the grammar and scarcely the phonetics of many of their languages.

Nor is this referable to the contrast between an Aryan and an American language. The same immiscibility is shown between themselves. "Even where many radically different languages are located closely together, as in Mexico, I have not found a single example where one exercised a constructive or formative influence on the other. But it is by the encounter of great and contrasted differences that languages gain strength, riches, and completeness. Only thus are the perceptive powers, the imagination and the feelings impelled to enrich and extend the means of expression, which, if left to the labors of the understanding alone, are liable to be but meagre and arid."†

### § 9. INTERNAL FORM OF LANGUAGES.

Besides the grammatical form of a language, Humboldt recognized another which he called its *internal form*. This is that

\* This reasoning is developed in the essay, *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium*, etc., *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. iii, ss. 211-268; and see *ibid*, s. 270.

† See the essay *Ueber die Buchstabenschrift und ihren Zusammenhang mit dem Sprachbau*, *Ges. Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 551-2.

subtle something not expressed in words, which even more than the formal parts of speech, reveals the linguistic genius of a nation. It may be defined as the impression which the language bears of the clearness of the conceptions of those speaking it, and of their native gift of speech. He illustrates it by instancing the absence of a developed mode in Sanscrit, and maintains that in the creators of that tongue the conception of modality was never truly felt and distinguished from tense. In this respect its inner form was greatly inferior to the Greek, in the mind of which nation the ideally perfect construction of the verb unfolded itself with far more clearness.

The study of this inner form of a language belongs to the highest realm of linguistic investigation, and is that which throws the most light on the national character and capacities.\*

#### § 10. CRITERIA OF RANK IN LANGUAGES.

Humboldt's one criterion of a language was its tendency to *quicken and stimulate mental action*. He maintained that this is secured just in proportion as the grammatical structure favors clear definition of the individual idea apart from its relations, in other words, as it separates the material from the inflectional elements of speech. Clear thinking, he argued, means progressive thinking. Therefore he assigned a lower position both to those tongues which inseparably connect the idea with its relations, as the American languages, and to those which, like the Chinese and in a less degree the modern English, have scarcely any formal elements at all, but depend upon the position of words (placement) to signify their relations.

But he greatly modified this unfavorable judgment by several extenuating considerations.

Thus he warns us that it is of importance to recognize fully "that grammatical principles dwell rather in the mind of the speaker than in the material and mechanism of his language." †

This led him to establish a distinction between *explicit* grammar, where the relations are fully expressed in speech, and *im-*

\* On this subtle point, which has been by no means the least difficult to his commentators, see Humboldt's Introduction *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., *Ges. Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 45-6, 92-5, 254-5, by a careful comparison of which passages his real intent will become apparent.

† *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat*, *Ges. Werke*, Bd. vii, s. 396.

*plicit* grammar, where they are wholly or in part left to be understood by the mind.

He expressly and repeatedly states that an intelligent thinker, trained in the grammatical distinctions of a higher language, can express any thought he has in the grammar of any other tongue which he masters, no matter how rude it is. This adaptability lies in the nature of speech in general. A language is an instrument, the use of which depends entirely on the skill of him who handles it. It is doubtful whether such imported forms and thoughts appeal in any direct sense to those who are native to the tongue. But the fact remains that the forms of the most barbarous languages are such that they may be developed to admit the expression of any kind of idea.

But the meaning of this must not be misconstrued. If languages were merely dead instruments which we use to work with, then one would be as good as another to him who had learned it. But this is not the case. Speech is a living, physiological function, and, like any other function, is most invigorating and vitalizing when it works in the utmost harmony with the other functions. Its special relationship is to that brain-action which we call thinking; and entire harmony between the two is only present when the form, structure and sounds of speech correspond accurately to the logical procedure of thought. This he considered "an undeniable fact."

The measure of the excellence of a language, therefore, is the clearness, definiteness and energy of the ideas which it awakes in the nation. Does it inspire and incite their mind? Has it positive and clear tones, and do these define sharply the ideas they represent, without needless accessories? Does its structure present the leading elements of the proposition in their simplicity, and permit the secondary elements to be grouped around them in subordinate positions, with a correct sense of linguistic perspective? The answers to these queries decide its position in the hierarchy of tongues.\*

\* "Nicht was in einer Sprache ausgedrückt zu werden vermag, sondern das, wozu sie aus eigener, innerer Kraft anfeuert und begeistert, entscheidet über ihre Vorzüge oder Mängel." *Ueber das Entstehen der Grammatischen Formen*, etc., *Werke*, Bd. iii, s. 272. Compare with this the expression in his celebrated *Einleitung*: "Die Sprache ist das bildende Organ des Gedanken," *Werke*, Bd. vi, s. 51. A perfected language will "allseitig und harmonisch durch sich selbst auf den Geist einwirken." *Ibid*, s. 31,



As its capacity for expression is no criterion of a language, still less is the abundance or regularity of its forms. For this very multiplicity, this excessive superfluity, is a burden and a drawback, and obscures the integration of the thought by attaching to it a quantity of needless qualifications. Thus, in the language of the Abipones, the pronoun is different as the person spoken of is conceived as present, absent, sitting, walking, lying, or running, all quite unnecessary specifications.\*

In some languages much appears as form which, on close scrutiny, is nothing of the kind.

This misunderstanding has reigned almost universally in the treatment of American tongues. The grammars which have been written upon them proceed generally on the principles of Latin, and apply a series of grammatical names to the forms explained, entirely inappropriate to them and misleading. Our first duty in taking up such a grammar as, for instance, that of an American language, is to dismiss the whole of the arrangement of the "parts of speech," and, by an analysis of words and phrases, to ascertain by what arrangement of elements they express logical, significant relations.†

For example, in the Carib tongue, the grammars give *aveiridaco* as the second person singular, subjunctive imperfect, "if thou wert." Analyze this, and we discover that *a* is the possessive pronoun "thy;" *veiri* is "to be" or "being" (in a place); and *daco* is a particle of definite time. Hence, the literal rendering is "on the day of thy being." The so-called imperfect subjunctive turns out to be a verbal noun with a preposition. In many American languages the hypothetical supposition expressed in the Latin subjunctive is indicated by the same circumlocution.

Again, the infinitive, in its classical sense, is unknown in most, probably in all, American languages. In the Tupi of Brazil and frequently elsewhere it is simply a noun; *caru* is both "to eat"

\* *Ueber d is Entstehen der grammatischen Formen,*" etc., *Werke*, Bd. iii, s. 292.

† Speaking of such "imperfect" languages, he gives the following wise suggestion for their study: "Ihr einfaches Geheimniss, welches den Weg anzeigt, auf welchem man sie, mit gänzlicher Vergessenheit unserer Grammatik, immer zuerst zu enträthseln versuchen muss, ist, das in sich Bedeutende unmittelbar an einander zu reihen" *Ueber das Vergleichende Sprachstudium*, etc., *Werke*, Bd. iii, s. 255; and for a practical illustration of his method, see the essay, *Ueber das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen*, etc., Bd. iii, s. 274.

and "food;" *che caru ai-pota*, "I wish to eat," literally "my food I wish."

In the Mexican, the infinitive is incorporated in the verb as an accusative, and the verb is put in the future of the person spoken of.

Many writers continue to maintain that a criterion of rank of a language is its lexicographical richness—the number of words it possesses. Even very recently, Prof. Max Müller has applied such a test to American languages, and, finding that one of the Fuegian dialects is reported to have nearly thirty thousand words, he maintains that this is a proof that these savages are a degenerate remnant of some much more highly developed ancestry. Founding his opinion largely on similar facts, Alexander von Humboldt applied the expression to the American nations that they are "*des débris échappés à un naufrage commun.*"

Such, however, was not the opinion of his brother Wilhelm. He sounded the depths of linguistic philosophy far more deeply than to accept mere abundance of words as proof of richness in a language. Many savage languages have twenty words signifying to eat particular things, but no word meaning "to eat" in general; the Eskimo language has different words for fishing for each kind of fish, but no word "to fish," in a general sense. Such apparent richness is, in fact, actual poverty.

Humboldt taught that the quality, not merely the quantity, of words was the decisive measure of verbal wealth. Such quality depends on the relations of concrete words, on the one hand, to the primitive objective perceptions at their root, and, on the other, to the abstract general ideas of which they are particular representatives; and besides this, on the relations which the spoken word, the articulate sound, bears to the philosophic laws of the formation of language in general.\*

In his letter to Abel-Remusat he discusses the theory that the American languages point to a once higher condition of civilization, and are the corrupted idioms of deteriorated races. He denies that there is linguistic evidence of any such theory. These

\* His teachings on this point, of which I give the barest outline, are developed in sections 12 and 13 of his Introduction, *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc. Steinthal's critical remarks on these sections (in his *Charakteristik der haupt. Typen des Sprachbaues*) seem to me unsatisfactory, and he even does not appear to grasp the chain of Humboldt's reasoning.

languages, he says, possess a remarkable regularity of structure, and very few anomalies. Their grammar does not present any visible traces of corrupting intermixtures.\*

In a later work he returns to the subject when speaking of the Lenape (Algonkin Delaware) dialect, and asks whether the rich imaginative power, of which it bears the evident impress, does not point to some youthful, supple and vigorous era in the life of language in general?† But he leaves the question unanswered.

### § 11. CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGES.

The lower unit of language is the Word; the higher is the Sentence. The plans on which languages combine words into sentences are a basic character of their structure, and divide them into classes as distinct and as decisive of their future, as those of vertebrate and invertebrate animals in natural history.

These plans are four in number :

#### 1. By Isolation.

The words are placed in juxtaposition, without change. Their relations are expressed by their location only (placement). The typical example of this is the Chinese.

#### 2. By Agglutination.

The sentence is formed by suffixing to the word expressive of the main idea a number of others, more or less altered, expressing the relations. Examples of this are the Eskimo of North America, and the Northern Asiatic dialects.

#### 3. By Incorporation.

The leading word of the sentence is divided and the accessory words either included in it or attached to it with abbreviated forms, so that the whole sentence assumes the form and sound of one word.

#### 4. By Inflection.

Each word of the sentence indicates by its own form the character and relation to the main proposition of the idea it represents. Sanscrit, Greek and Latin are familiar examples of inflected tongues.

\* *Lettre à M. Abel-Remusat. Werke*, Bd. vii, ss. 353-4.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., Sec. 23, *Werke*, Bd. vi, s. 329.

It is possible to suppose that all four of these forms were developed from some primitive condition of utterance unknown to us, just as naturalists believe that all organic species were developed out of a homogeneous protoplasmic mass ; but it is as hard to see how any one of them in its present form could pass over into another, as to understand how a radiate could change into a mollusk.

#### § 12. NATURE OF INCORPORATION.

Of the four plans mentioned, Incorporation is that characteristic of, though not confined to, American tongues.

It may appear in a higher or a lower grade, but its intention is everywhere the effort to convey in one word the whole proposition. The Verb, as that part of speech which especially conveys the synthetic action of the mental operation, is that which is selected as the stem of this word-sentence ; all the other parts are subordinate accessories, devoid of syntactic value.

The higher grade of incorporation includes both subject, object and verb in one word, and if for any reason the object is not included, the scheme of the sentence is still maintained in the verb, and the object is placed outside, as in apposition, without case ending, and under a form different from its original and simple one.

This will readily be understood from the following examples from the Mexican language.

The sentence *ni-naca-qua*, is one word and means "I, flesh, eat." If it is desired to express the object independently, the expression becomes *ni-c-qua-in-nacatl*, "I it eat, the flesh." The termination *tl* does not belong to the root of the noun, but is added to show that it is in an external, and, as it were, unnatural position. Both the direct and remote object can thus be incorporated, and if they are not, but separately appended, the scheme of the sentence is still preserved ; as *ni-te-tla-maca*, literally, "I, something, to somebody, give." How closely these accessories are incorporated is illustrated by the fact that the tense arguments are not added to the stem, but to the whole word ; *o-ni-c-te-maca-e*, "I have given it to somebody ;" when the *o* is the prefix of the perfect.

In these languages, every element in the sentence, which is not incorporated in the verb, has, in fact, no syntax at all. The

verbal exhausts all the formal portion of the language. The relations of the other words are intimated by their position. Thus *ni-tlaçollaz-nequia*, I wished to love, is literally "I, I shall love, I wished." *Tlaçollaz*, is the first person singular of the future, *ni-nequia*, I wished, which is divided, and the future form inserted. The same expression may stand thus: *ni-c-nequia-tlaçollaz*, where the *c* is an intercalated relative pronoun, and the literal rendering is, "I it wished, I shall love."

In the Lule language the construction with an infinitive is simply that the two verbs follow each other in the same person, as *caic tueuec*, "I am accustomed to eat," literally, "I am accustomed, I eat."

None of these devices fulfill all the uses of the infinitive, and hence they are all inferior to it.

In languages which lack formal elements, the deficiency must be supplied by the mind. Words are merely placed in juxtaposition, and their relationship guessed at. Thus, when a language constructs its cases merely by prefixing prepositions to the unaltered noun, there is no grammatical form; in the Mbaya language *e-tiboa* is translated "through me," but it is really "I, through;" *vemani*, is rendered "he wishes," but it is strictly "he, wish."

In such languages the same collocation of words often corresponds to quite different meanings, as the precise relation of the thoughts is not defined by any formal elements. This is well illustrated in the Tupi tongue. The word *uba* is "father;" with the pronoun of the third person prefixed it is *tuba*, literally "he, father." This may mean either "his father," or "he is a father," or "he has a father," just as the sense of the rest of the sentence requires.

Certainly a language which thus leaves confounded together ideas so distinct as these, is inferior to one which discriminates them; and this is why the formal elements of a tongue are so important to intellectual growth. The Tupis may be an energetic and skillful people, but with their language they can never take a position as masters in the realm of ideas.

The absence of the passive in most, if not all, American tongues is supplied by similar inadequate collocations of words. In Huasteca, for example, *nana tanin tahjal*, is translated "I

am treated by him ;" actually it is, "I, me, treats he." This is not a passive, but simply the idea of the Ego connected with the idea of another acting upon it.

This is vastly below the level of inflected speech ; for it cannot be too strenuously maintained that the grammatical relations of spoken language are the more perfect and favorable to intellectual growth, the more closely they correspond to the logical relations of thought.

Sometimes what appears as inflection turns out on examination to be merely adjunction. Thus in the Mbaya tongue there are such verbal forms as *daladi*, thou wilt throw, *nilabuite*, he has spun, when the *d* is the sign of the future, and the *n* of the perfect. These look like inflections ; but in fact *d*, is simply a relic of *quide*, hereafter, later, and *n* stands in the same relation to *quine*, which means "and also."

To become true formal elements, all such adjuncts must have completely lost their independent signification ; because if they retain it, their material content requires qualification and relation just as any other stem word.

A few American languages may have reached this stage. In the Mexican there are the terminals *ya* or *a* in the imperfect, the augment *o* in the preterit, and others in the future. In the Tamanaca the present ends in *a*, the preterit in *e*, the future in *c* "There is nothing in either of these tongues to show that these tense signs have independent meaning, and therefore there is no reason why they should not be classed with those of the Greek and Sanscrit as true inflectional elements."\*

### § 13. PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF INCORPORATION.

This Incorporative plan, which may be considered as distinctive of the American stock of languages, is explained in its psychological origin by Humboldt, as the result of an *exaltation of the imaginative over the intellectual elements of mind*. By this method, the linguistic faculty strives to present to the understanding the whole thought in the most compact form possible, thus to facilitate its comprehension ; and this it does, because a

\* "Der Mexikanischen kann man am Verbum, in welchem die Zeiten durch einzelne Endbuchstaben und zum Theil offenbar symbolisch bezeichnet werden, Flexionen und ein gewisses Streben nach Sanskritischer Wortelnheit nicht absprechen." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit, etc., Werke*, Bd. vi, s. 176.

thought presented in one word is more vivid and stimulating to the imagination, more individual and picturesque, than when narrated in a number of words.\*

But the mistake must not be made of supposing that Incorporation is a *creative act* of the language-sense, or that its products, the compounds that it builds, are real words. Humboldt was careful to impress this distinction, and calls such incorporated compounds examples of *collocation* (*Zusammensetzung*), not of *synthesis* (*Zusammenfassung*). On this ground, he doubted, and with justice, the assertion of Dupleau, that the long words of the Lenape (Delaware) dialect are formed by an arbitrary selection of the phonetic parts of a number of words, without reference to the radical syllables.† He insisted, as is really the case, that in all instances the significant syllable or syllables are retained.

#### § 14. EFFECT OF INCORPORATION ON COMPOUND SENTENCES.

As has been seen, the theory of Incorporation is to express the whole proposition, as nearly as possible, in one word; and what part of it cannot be thus expressed, is left without any syntax whatever. Not only does this apply to individual words in a sentence, but it extends to the various clauses of a compound sentence, such as in Aryan languages show their relation to the leading clauses by means of prepositions, conjunctions and relative pronouns.

When the methods are analyzed by which the major and minor clauses are assigned their respective values in these tongues, it is very plain what difficulties of expression the system of Incorporation involves. Few of them have any true connecting word of either of the three classes above mentioned. They depend on scarcely veiled material words, simply placed in juxtaposition.

It is probable that the prepositions and conjunctions of all

\* "Daher ist das Einschliessen in Ein Wort mehr Sache der Einbildungskraft, die Trennung mehr die des Verstandes." *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., s. 327. Compare also, s. 326 and 166. Steintal points out the disadvantages of the incorporative plan and puts it lower than the isolating system of the Chinese; but fails to recognize its many and striking advantages. See his remarks, "Ueber das Wesen und Werth der Einverleibungsmethode," in his *Charakteristik der haupt. Typen des Sprachbaues*, s. 214.

† *Ueber die Verschiedenheit*, etc., in *Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 323 sqq.

languages were at first significant words, and the degree to which they have lost their primary significations and have become purely formal elements expressing relation, is one of the measures of the grammatical evolution of a tongue. In most American idioms their origin from substantives is readily recognizable. Frequently these substantives refer to parts of the body, and this, in passing, suggests the antiquity of this class of words and their value in comparison.

In Maya *tan* means in, toward, among; but it is also the breast or front of the body. The Mexican has three classes of prepositions—the first, whose origin from a substantive cannot be detected; the second, where an unknown and a known element are combined; the third, where the substantive is perfectly clear. An example of the last mentioned is *itic*, in, compounded of *ite*, belly, and the locative particle *c*; the phrase *ilhuicatl itic*, in heaven, is literally “in the belly of heaven.” Precisely the same is the Cakchiquel *pamcañ*, literally, “belly, heaven”—in heaven. In Mexican, *notepotzco* is “behind me,” literally, “my back, at;” this corresponds again to the Cakchiquel *chuih*, behind me, from *chi*, at, *u*, my, *vih*, shoulder-blades. The Mixteca prepositions present the crude nature of their origin without disguise, *chisi huahi*, belly, house—that is, in front of the house; *sata huahi*, back, house—behind the house.

The conjunctions are equally transparent. “And” in Maya is *yetel*, in Mexican *ihuan*. One would suppose that such an indispensable connective would long since have been worn down to an insoluble entity. On the contrary, both these words retain their perfect material meaning. *Yetel* is a compound of *y*, his, *et*, companion, and *el*, the definite termination of nouns. *Ihuan* is the possessive, *i*, and *huan*, associate, companion, used also as a termination to form a certain class of plurals.

The deficiency in true conjunctions and relative pronouns is met in many American languages by a reversal of the plan of expression with us. The relative clause becomes the principal one. There is a certain logical justice in this; for, if we reflect, it will appear evident that the major proposition is, in our construction, presented as one of the conditions of the minor. “I shall drown, if I fall in the water,” means that, of the various results of my falling in the water, one of them will be that I



shall drown. "I followed the road which you described," means that you described a road, and one of the results of this act of yours was that I followed it.

This explains the plan of constructing compound sentences in Quichua. Instead of saying "I shall follow the road which you describe," the construction is "You describe, this road I shall follow;" and instead of "I shall drown if I fall in the water," it would be, "I fall in the water, I shall drown."

The Mexican language introduces the relative clause by the word *in*, which is an article and demonstrative pronoun, or, if the proposition is a conditional one, by *intla*, which really signifies "within this," and conveys the sense that the major is included within the conditions of the minor clause. The Cakchiquel conditional particle is *vuc*, if, which appears to be simply the particle of affirmation "yes," employed to give extension to the minor clause, which, as a rule, is placed first.

Or a conventional arrangement of words may be adopted which will convey the idea of certain dependent clauses, as those expressing similitude, as is often the case in Mexican.

### § 15. THE DUAL IN AMERICAN LANGUAGES.

In his admirable philosophical examination of the dual number in language, Humboldt laid the foundation of a linguistic theory of numerals which has not yet received the development it merits. Here he brings into view the dual and plural endings of a list of American languages, and explains the motives on which they base the inclusive and exclusive plurals so common among them. It is, in fact, a species of pronominal dual confined to the first person in the plural.

This, he goes on to say, is by no means the only dual in these tongues. Some of them express both the other classes of duals which he names. Thus, the Totonaca has duals for all objects which appear as pairs in nature, as the eyes, the ears, the hands, etc.; while the Araucanian equals the Sanscrit in extending the grammatical expression of the dual through all parts of speech where it can find proper application.\*

\* See the essay, *Ueber den Dualis*, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. vi, ss. 562-596.

## § 16. HUMBOLDT'S ESSAY ON THE AMERICAN VERB.

The essay on the American verb translated in the following pages has never previously appeared in print, either in German or English. The original MS. is in the Royal Library at Berlin, whence I obtained a transcript. The author alludes to this essay in several passages of his printed works, most fully in his "Letter to M. Abel-Remusat" (1826), in which he says :

"A few years ago, I read before the Berlin Academy a memoir, which has not been printed, in which I compared a number of American languages with each other, solely with regard to the manner in which they express the verb as uniting the subject with the attribute in the proposition, and from this point of view I assigned them to various classes. As this trait proves to what degree a language possesses grammatical forms, or is near to possessing them, it is decisive of the whole grammar of a tongue."

On reading the memoir, I was so much impressed with the acuteness and justness of its analysis of American verbal forms that I prepared the translation which I now submit.

In the more recent studies of the American verb which have appeared from the pens of Friedrich Müller, J. Hammond Trumbull and Lucien Adam, we have the same central element of speech subjected to critical investigation at able hands. But it seems to me that none of them has approached the topic with the broad, philosophic conceptions which impress the reader in this essay of Humboldt's. Although sixty years and more have elapsed since it was written, I am confident that it will provide ample food for thought to the earnest student of language.